

AMENDMENT UNDER 37 C.F.R. § 1.111
U.S. Application No. 09/392,585
Attorney Docket No. Q55716

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION

Abstract of the Disclosure:

According to the process for monitoring the consumptions of a plurality of franking machines through a public communication network, at least one franking machine not being connected to this network, a link is firstly established with a management server, through the public network, by means of at least one supervision terminal independent of the off-line franking machine, in accordance with a determined protocol of communication, and data is then exchanged between the terminal and the server during which the user acquires inputs at the supervision terminal a current invoicing index relative to the off-line franking machine and receives in return a code of authorization to frank in order to validate the subsequent frankings of the off-line franking machine.

Page 2, Second Paragraph:

These objects are attained by a process for monitoring the consumptions of a plurality of franking machines through a public communication network, at least one franking machine not being connected to this network, characterized in that a link with a management server is firstly established through the public network, by means of at least one supervision terminal independent of the at least one offline franking machine, in accordance with a determined protocol of communication, and then data are

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exchanged between the terminal and the server during which the user acquires inputs at the supervision terminal a current invoicing index relative to the at least one off-line franking machine and in return receives a code of authorization to frank in order to validate the subsequent frankings of the at least one off-line franking machine. The protocol of communication used for establishing a link with the remote server is either a Videotex protocol, for example the teletel protocol, or a protocol of TCP/IP type.

Page 3, Second Paragraph:

The data exchange step comprises a step of acquisition inputting by the user of an identifier including at least one password or personal identification number and a step of display, at the supervision terminal, on the one hand, of a list of the printing heads associated with said user's plurality of franking machines, and, on the other hand, for each printing head, of a last invoicing index validated by the server.

Page 4, Second through Fourth Paragraphs Continued to Page 5:

Referring now to the drawings, an example of configuration of a user's set of franking machines is shown in Figure 1. This set is located for example at two different production sites. On a first site S1, a single franking machine of electronic type is available, connected by a modem 12 to a public communication network, for example the switched telephone network or a numeric network (~~RTC/RIVIS~~ PSTN/ISDN 40). On a

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second site S2, distinct from the first, five franking machines, three of electronic type and two traditional electromechanical machines, are available. The electronic machines 20, 22, 24 are for example connected to an internal network 26 which presents a common access to the public network 40 via a modem 28, while the two traditional machines 30, 32 are, on the contrary, isolated from this network and operate independently.

The user's different franking machines are under the surveillance of a data-processing server charged with managing the set of the franking machines and disposed at a distance from these production sites in premises A of the Postal Service or at the machine dealer's. This server 50 is conventionally connected by a communication means to a network (of the type RTC/RNISPSTN/ISDN/X25), for example via a modem 52 to the public network 40.

According to the invention, at least one supervision terminal 60 is provided, connected to the public network by a modem 62 (which is preferably integrated in the terminal) and ensuring for the user the acquisition-input and display of data necessary for the management of his set of franking machines. This terminal is advantageously located on a production site near the traditional machines not having a link to the public network. Of course, a plurality of terminals having access to the same data may be disposed on the same site or on different sites depending on the user's needs. The terminal is placed in relation with the server by means of a videotex protocol (for

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example the protocol known under the name of "Teletel") or by a so-called TCP/IP protocol through an Internet explorer 5 (browser) and in accordance with a specific process which will now be explained with reference to Figure 2 and which shows the different steps of placing the terminal 60 of the user's set of franking machines in relation with the server 50 of the Postal Service (or of the dealer of these machines).

Page 5, First Paragraph:

After having made the connection with the server (connection to the 10 "Minitel" service or to the Internet site of the server), a welcome page appears on the screen of the terminal. In a first step 100, the user is invited to enter via the keyboard of the terminal his identifier which may consist of a customer's name or a password or a personal identification number (PIN). If these references are correct, the server displays at the terminal, in a following step 110, the complete list of the printing heads (electronic and traditional) in the user's possession (on all these sites or possibly on a given site if the user so requests) with, for each of them, both the last index of invoicing previously validated by the server and the current index (the preceding acquisition) with its corresponding date of acquisition. If said references are not correct, the user is invited to renew his identification (it will be noted that, in the event of repeated failures, the connection to the server is automatically interrupted and a call to the After-Sales Service is then necessary in order to re-establish the service).

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Step 110 may also optionally comprise a step of display at the supervision terminal of a selectable plurality of tables and/or statistics in graph form relating to this list of printing heads.

Page 7, First Paragraph:

It will have been noted that the acquisition inputting of the indexes is, of course, valid only for traditional machines, the indexes of the other heads not ~~been able to be modified~~ being modifiable in this manner. However, by displaying the indexes of all the printing heads, it is possible to give the user a complete picture of his set of franking machines and therefore to be able to inform him at any moment of the state thereof, the preceding and current indexes of the electronic machines being in fact sent in known manner once a day directly to the server by the permanent links existing between the franking machines and the server.

Page 7, Last Paragraph Continued to Page 8:

The structure of the franking machine for carrying out the process according to the invention is illustrated in Figure 3. In addition to the conventional devices (not shown) concerning the entry, the conveying and the positioning of the postal items with a view to printing the postal indicia, it comprises a printing head 70 for ensuring this printing under the control of a central processing unit 72 conventionally comprising means for memorizing programmes and data. A non-volatile memory 74 is further

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provided to receive the postal data and in particular the content of the reversible meters which are preferably memorized as a function of date (and hour) data furnished by a clockcalender 76. A user interface 78 provided with a keyboard and a display means, for example of the liquid crystal type, is also available at the level of the franking machine to allow the acquisition of diverse data necessary for franking (for example the nature of the carrier or category of dispatch and possibly weight of the article to be mailed in the absence of automatic weighing) and the display of multiple information for the user (verification of the acquisitions-inputs for example) and in particular the invoicing index.

Page 8, Second and Third Paragraphs Continued to Page 9:

By this system, the user is obliged to dialogue regularly with the server in order to avoid a blockage of his machines. In addition, as, after each connection, a calculation of the code of authorization to frank is proceeded with, integrating in particular the current index acquired by the user, frauds on this index are eliminated as, upon acquisition-ofinputting this code on the franking machine, any error will block the machine. A stricter surveillance of the postal traffic is also obtained, as well as a better security of the exchange of information.

If the set of franking machines comprises only machines linked to the network, the acquisition-input of the identifier including at least one password or personal

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identification number will show on the display screen of the supervision terminal used a menu allowing the user to acquire-input new invoicing indexes relative to all these machines, or to consult the state of all the machines of the set with the last respective indexes validated by the server as state of the various statistical data defining this set, able to be parametered, locally or globally, in the form of tables and graphic representations in particular.

Page 9, Second Paragraph:

The invention thus covers a process for monitoring the consumptions of a plurality of franking machines through a public communication network, in which a link is firstly established with a management server, by means of at least one supervision terminal independent of this plurality of machines, in accordance with a determined protocol of communication, and an exchange of data is then proceeded with between the terminal and the server during which the user acquires-inputs at the supervision terminal an identifier including at least one password or a personal identification number, and receives in return the possibility of selecting in a display menu of said terminal, the acquisition inputting of new indexes or the display of the last indexes validated by the server such as statistical data relating to said plurality of franking machines.